

PREFACE

To many a visitor to Burma, who views the country from the deck 101
of an Irrawaddy River steamer or from the window of a railway 121
carriage, there appears to be little difference between the Karen and
the Burman. This is not strange, for many individuals of the non-
Burman tribes wear the Burmese costume and speak the Burmese
language; and they present no markedly different characteristics
in feature or color of skin. I have often heard the remark that
"there is no difference between the Burman and the Karen." It is
doubtless because the Government of Burma recognizes that there
is a difference in the tribal characteristics, customs, and religion
that it has adopted the wise policy of publishing a series of complete
studies, of which this purports to be one, of these various peoples.
If the reader will have the patience to read these pages, it is hoped
that he will realize that, though the Karen have lived for genera-
tions in the closest proximity to the Burmese, they preserve their
own racial traits, which are quite distinct from those of their more
volatile neighbors with whom they have had little in common.

This work deals more particularly with the Sgaw branch of the 101
Karen people. My own acquaintance has been more intimate with
this tribe, though I have known many of the other groups. This
circumstance, together with the fact that the Bwe and Taungthu
peoples have already been described in the *Upper Burma Gazetteer*,
as well as the limitations of space, has led me to limit my discussion
to brief references to the other tribes. But I am convinced that in
the main the Sgaw exhibit the general characteristics that are truly
Karen in the broadest sense of the term. I have also omitted any
detailed study of the large mass of Karen folklore, which may
possibly be incorporated in some future study.

The reader may notice that I have used the term "Karen," in- 101
stead of the more usual plural form "Karens," when referring 104
to the tribal name. This is more accurate, for to add the "s" is
as misleading in this case as in that of the Lao, who are often mis-
takenly spoken of as the "Laos." In the transliteration of Karen
words I have followed the continental system of spelling, adopting
"x" for the guttural which is pronounced like the "ch" in the Scotch
"loch," and the diphthong "eu" for the sound which closely resembles

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● 104 the common pronunciation of "er" as in "her." I have accepted the simplified spelling for the tribal names, Pwo and Bwe, in place of the more cumbersome "Pgho" and "Bg hai."

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124 It is not without some misgivings that I allow these sheets to go to the publisher. The notes were collected at such intervals as could be taken from my labors as a district missionary, and that at a time when increasing administrative duties precluded my giving such attention to them as I could wish. The return to America on furlough necessitated the completion of the work on the opposite side of the world from the sources of my material, and where, though I enjoyed the privileges of a Graduate Fellowship at the Ohio State University, I had to depend largely on my personal collections, there being no department of Ethnology there.

000 I wish to acknowledge the assistance which I have had from my wife, whose sympathetic interest and accurate knowledge have been of untold value, and also the help I have received from my missionary colleagues, among whom I should mention my father-in-law, Rev. D. A. W. Smith, D.D.; Rev. C. A. Nichols, D.D., who was first to ask me to undertake the preparation of this work, and Rev. E. N. Harris. Among the many Karen members of the mission staff who have helped in the gathering of materials, I can only mention Thras San Gyi San Kwe, Po Myaing, and Shwe Thee, of Tharrawaddy; Thra Pan Ya Se, of Shwegyin; and Thra Aung Gaing, of Insein, who gave me a full account of the Karen of Siam. The sketches signed "D. P." are the work of a Karen schoolboy from Tavoy, Saw Day Po, who, to his credit it should be said, drew them without having had any instruction in drawing whatever. My thanks are also due to Drs. B. Laufer and Fay Cooper-Cole, of the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, for many valuable suggestions, and to Professors J. A. Leighton and W. H. Siebert, of the Ohio State University, for many kindnesses. To Professor Siebert I am especially indebted for a most painstaking review of my entire manuscript, for its acceptance for publication, and for seeing it through the press of the Ohio State University. Finally, I desire to express my gratitude to the Government of Burma for the privilege of undertaking this work. The necessity for careful observation and thorough investigation has not been without its benefits to me. The undertaking has been exacting and quite instructive, even if it had benefited no one but myself.

This book is, after all, but another by-product of the great missionary enterprise, which seeks to lift the less fortunate peoples of

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Besides being called eternal, God is described as "all powerful" and as "having the knowledge of all things." He created man and "woman from a rib of man," and he made the animals and placed them on the earth.

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The power mentioned in the old poems as opposed to "Y'wa" and as having brought evil into the world is "Naw k' plaw." In later poems the name given to him is "Mü kaw li," which is a term of reproach used on account of his often being supposed to assume the female form, in order to accomplish his deceptions on the human race.*

He is said to have been a servant of "Y'wa" at first, but to have been cast out of his lord's presence for offering him a gross insult. The other servants of "Y'wa" have ever since cherished the desire to destroy "Mü kaw li," but have never accomplished their purpose. Hence, he continues to roam about, deceiving mankind and spreading death among them, until he shall finally be put out of the way by "Y'wa" himself. He is the direct author of evil and of the curse that has fallen upon the earth which, before his contemptible conduct, had produced rice with kernels as large as pumpkins. It was through his malicious instructions that the people learned to make sacrifices to the "Bgha" and other demons.

The Karen legends and poems give the story of the fall of man in their own picturesque language, which has been translated into English by Dr. D. C. Gilmore, who has brought together the several versions extant in various parts of the country. For the most part I shall paraphrase and condense Dr. Gilmore's translation; for the original narratives, whether in prose or verse, are full of repetitions, variations in insignificant details, and other peculiarities incident to tales that have been handed down by word of mouth.

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The Lord "Y'wa," father of the human race, spoke to the first pair he had created: "My son and daughter both, your father will make an orchard for you, and in that orchard there will be seven kinds of trees bearing seven kinds of fruit. Of the seven kinds there

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* The derivation of the names of this being are interesting. "Naw" is the usual feminine prefix of the names of all females, and "k' plaw" signifies quickly, in reference to the suddenness with which his power to tempt one was exercised. The later name, which has now come into universal use both among non-Christian and Christian Karens as the designation of the Devil, is composed of "mü," meaning woman; "kaw," signifying the state of or pertaining to, and "li," denoting the female locus impudicus. This combination constitutes a term of the utmost contempt and refers to the insult which Satan visited upon "Y'wa" when offerings were being brought to him. The Devil's offering was a sow on which he had misecrated. His act was discovered and aroused the anger of the entire celestial company.

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APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY OF KAREN WORDS

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NOTE. The vowels in this glossary are to be pronounced after the usual continental method. *ea* is pronounced as *e* in *met*, and *ou* as *o* in *her*. The Greek *s* is used for the guttural which is pronounced as *ah* in *look*, and *th* is as in *this*. Aspirated consonants are indicated by placing the *h* in front of the letter as *ah*, *ap*, *at*, etc. The half vowel is shown by the apostrophe following the letter, as *h'*, *t'*, etc. In pronouncing, slip over this half vowel as in the first syllable of *cajole* or the colloquial pronunciation of *t'morrow*.

Bgha, family demon.

bghe e Aho, leader of the *bghe* feast.

bla e, bat dung; powder.

blaw, young men's club room, or guest room.

Bvon, name of a Karen tribe.

Bu deu Atoe K, the paddy has headed out (*Bt.*, conceived).

bwa, seeds of the coix plant.

Bwo (for *Bghai*), the name of a Karen tribe.

dah (Burmese), long knife.

daw da, a relation by marriage.

daw t' ha, race of giants who feed on the *K'iao* of mortals.

den, room or section of a village-house.

den mli lwa hpa, three stars just east of the Pleiades.

De uga, a *hly*, the *hly* month (May).

de la, a plot selected for cultivation in the hills.

Ghu Lo So } two Pwo Karens who stole the original drums.

Ghuw Ser Pau }
Ghuw Kwa Htu } names of the two original bronze drums.

Ghuw Kaw So }
Gai Aho, the name of a Karen tribe.

Ht, house.

hi hpa sak, tiny model of a house used in *bghe* rites.

Akaw, the foot.

Akhi, the crossbow.

Akhi y' ti, a kind of long bow.

Aho, the head.

Aho Ahi, the fontanel.

Aho pou, a headress or turban.

Aho pou ki, a woman's woven headress.

Aho ouw, a hut-shaped receptacle for the bones of the dead.

Aho so law, a receptacle as above, but pagoda-shaped.

Ah' ya, trumpet-shaped fish trap.

Hhi da, demon of the dry season.

Hhi Ta, king of hades.

hpa k' pu, a shuplance.

hpa hpaou mli, midnight.

'pa ti, uncle.

hpaw, a flower.

hpaw bee, yellow cockscowh.

hpaw ghaw, red cockscowh.

vi ba, musical pipes.

Hpi Bi Yaw, name of the goddess of the crops.

hpa, child; *Htla*.

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- Apo hhuwa, a son.
Apo mü, a daughter.
Apo nga mo, { part of wedding ceremony, (lit., children tease mother, children tease father).
Apo nga pa, {
Apo tha Ahwa Ataw, to become adolescent (spoken of a boy).
Ase, a star; also the right thigh bone of a fowl used in divination.
Ase a Ase neu mi, a good omen derived from reading the chicken bones.
Hse bü Apaw, the Milky Way.
Hse deu mü, the Pleiades.
Hse hhi hho, the constellation Sagittarius.
Hse h' Aaw, the Great Bear, (lit., the elephant).
Hse kwe Aha, Orion.
Ase f' ee, a constellation.
Hse Ate Aha, three stars south of the Pleiades.
Hse tu phaw, the morning star.
Hse tu Aa, the evening star.
Ase mah Ataw, a comet.
Hse mo la, a star near the moon.
Hse ye ma, the three stars of Orion's belt.
Ase ya, }
Ase Apo tha, } shooting stars.
Aaw, a fowl; also a basket for catching fish.
Aaw xi pu ti Ataw, a good omen obtained from reading the fowl's bones.
Aaw xi wa Aaw, a less favorable omen.
Aaw xi hu hho mi, a rather unfavorable omen.
Aaw xi Ataw dek ppha h' la, an unfavorable omen.
Aaw o, the crowing of the cock; early morning.
Ase, a Karen garment; a smock.
Ase pte, a man's garment.
Hoi Ase, the tenth month.
Hoi mü, the ninth month.
Ase hho, a platform for receiving guests.
Ate, a hand loom; a song.
Ate do, an epic poem.
Ate mo ppha, a great poem.
Ate wa do, poems chanted over the dead.
Ate Apo, lyric poems, or narrative poems of light character.
Ate pii, poems of the dead.
Ate thi hweu, extempore poems of betrothal.
Ate thwe pii, poems chanted at funerals addressed to the spirit.
Ate pek lau pii, poems for the king of hadou.
Ataw lau, a cry which one utters on hearing strange noises in the jungle.
Htaw meh, Monday.
htek, a plow.
htex, a bag.
Hte kü, the second month.
hti, water.
hti haw, a scoop for catching fish in shallow water.
Hti h' saw h' ee, the lords of water and land; the lords of the earth.
Ate pu lau, place in the house for the water-joint.
hti th' ee, charmed water.
hti sek meh yee, the river of running sand, or the sandy river.
hte bo, a pole for poling a boat.
hte tu, a harrow.
htet maw sek, a hunting dog.

K'le, the shade or spirit of a person.
K'le pphak, a booth.
K'le, the wind.
K'paw te tha, a demon who causes total eclipses.
K'ee, lord, (a person or a title).

APPENDIX A.—GLOSSARY.—CONTINUED

- 104
- k'hu*, a shield.
k'hi, medicine.
k'hi *hau* *tha*, a magical tiger medicine.
k'hi *thra*, a doctor (lit., a teacher of medicine).
ka *hau* *at*, the inspecting of fowl's bones for divinations.
ka *law* *ta*, an offering for demons.
ka *ya*, the Red Karen tribe.
Karen (Burmese), the Karen people.
ka *lu*, a censer, the leaves of which are used in certain rites.
ka *ma*, a mat.
ka (couplet, *ka* *epa* *tra* *epa*), bronze drums.
ka *a* *da*, the base tube of a Karen xylophone.
ka *ka* *pa*,
ka *wa* *ti*, } three kinds of Karen bronze
ka *pha* *pi* }
ka, a basket.
ka, the cry of the wildcat.
ka *ka*, the wedding horn.
ka *see* (Burmese), a triangular gong.

La, the moon; a month.
La *ah*, the fourth month.
La *ah*, the ninth month.
La *na*, the eleventh month.
La *na*, the seventh month.
La *pi*, the twelfth month.
La *sa*, the eighth month.
La, demons of the rainy season.
La *ha*, demons who bring about the reproduction of the grain.
la *na*, stones having magical power.
li, grandchildren.
Li *na*, Sunday.
li, to transmit life.
la *yi* (Burmese), a loin cloth or shirt worn by men and women.

Ma, a wife.
ma *apo* *tha*, little wife or concubine.
ma, a small bamboo cup.
ma *ka*, a giant croaker, the seeds of which are used as playthings.
ma *law*, *ka*, the king of the crocodiles.
ma *law*, rice cooked in joints of bamboo.
ma *a*, fire.
Ma *in* *ha*, the Southern Cross.
ma *do*, a large bamboo trap.
ma, the left thigh bone of a fowl used in divinations.
ma *a* *mi* *na* *ha*, an evil omen obtained from reading the fowl's bones.
Ma *daw* *apo*, Friday.
ma, mother.
ma *a* *at*, an offering made to bring a good crop of paddy.
ma, the sun.
ma *pa*, aunt.
ma *hau* *law*, early evening.
ma *ka* *ha* *law*, sunrise.
ma *ka* *ha* *apo* *ha* *law*, the sun is high.
Ma *ha*, the king of spirits.
ma *ha* *wa* *ha* *law*, dawn, (lit., the sun's garment whitens).
Ma *ha* *apo* *ha* *law*, Saturday.
ma *ha*, noon.
Ma *ha* *ha* *li*, the evil power or devil.
ma *law* *ma*, the sun is set.
ma *sa* *law*, the sun declines.
ma *pa* *ma*, late evening, (lit., the sun is deep down).

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mā ppha, a married woman.
Mū sa, celestial spirits that preside over births.
Mū sa do, one of the principal demons of the Karen.
Mū sa h'leu, a divinity presiding over the banyan tree.
muri, a blood-brother; a friend.

Na, a sword.
na ngu hti mak, a sword shaped like the tail of an eel.
na thak hko, a sword with two edges and a sharp point.
na sa hko, a blunt-pointed cutting sword.
naw bū tha, sling-shot pellets.
Naw k'plew, the evil demon opposed to Y'wa (God).
naw saw, wild indigo.
ni, a woman's skirt; a day; a year.
ni-thaw, the couplet meaning a day.
ni-la, the couplet meaning a year.
nye, fish.
nye u, fish paste, (lit. rotten fish); Burmese, *ngape*.

P'yo, a great dragon or a demon in the form of a great dragon.
pa, father.
Pa k' sa, Father God (used of Y'wa).
paw, (Burmese, *pauk*), a kind of fish-trap.
paw ka, a xylophone.
paw leh, the sea.
paw na, plants having magical powers.
ppha, a person; also means old.
ppha a ppha, a wonder worker or magician.
ppha bu ppha, one who has offended the family demon.
Ppha k' nyaw, the Karen term for themselves, (lit. men).
ppha h'aw lau hko, one who marries outside the tribe.
ppha tha ppha, an old man; an elder.
ppha, an impersonal all-pervasive force; (Melanesian, *mana*).
ppha phaw, the peacock pheasant.
Ppha phaw, the twin peak of Mt. Thaw Thi, the sacred mountain.
po, the method of preventing witches from working evil charms.
po dwe, open bamboo pipes.
pu-u-a, a call for children, fowls, spirits, etc.
pu, a fish-trap.
pula, betel-leaf vines trained to run up tall trees.
Pu Maw Tau, mythical owner of the first bronze drums.

Soh, a rough basket.
spha, the fructifying principle in life.
sa, power to resist an evil charm; personality; a generation.
soh, a charm made out of a wild boar's tusk.
so so sa sa, generation upon generation; eternally.
Spaw, the name of a Karen tribe.

T'ba, negative particle.
t'kaw, a measure of distance; the distance one can hear a call.
t'hka, a pace.
T'hte me kaw, the demon that causes partial eclipses.
t'hkwa, a cousin.
t'hki, a yard.
t'kpi, the stretch of the thumb and forefinger.
t'ka, a hand's breadth.
Taw kaw, the third month.
t'he t' h'wa, a disappointment brought about by disregarding a taboo.
t'hw' lau, a stone's throw.
Tig, a post set up at funerals over the receptacle holding the bones.

APPENDIX A.—GLOSSARY.—CONTINUED

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- f'lon, a fish-trap made by placing a jar in the water.
f'la pa, a mediator who arranges weddings.
f'nal to lah, a half-day's journey.
f'na, a harp.
f'ni lah, a day's journey.
f'na, the destroying angel who exterminates the wicked.
f'nia, a rabbit.
f'no f' hla, ghosts of tyrants, etc., who harass mortals.
f'na, a unit of measure.
f'ell m-é, the length of the forefinger.
f'na, the Jew's-harp.
f'na, Karen armor.
f'pau, a decoration of the bark of a tree used for washing the hair.
f'pau lo he a k'la, rites intended to recall the k'la or spirit of the dead.
ta, the nominal prefix.
to aw b'pha, the feast to the household demons.
to aw b'pau a hla, a feast as above to prevent illness.
to aw aw he aw na, the feast at which all relatives must be present.
to aw k'tou, a final feast before giving up the worship of the demons.
to di lau buah lah, an offering to the king of hades.
to do h'hou, the rhinoceros.
To do h'tha, to do h'hou, the Great Elephant addressed as a demon.
to di to h'la, tabu, chiefly prohibition of work.
to di h'au h'la hu, tabu to be observed at the time of an earthquake.
to di h'la to do thak, the tabu after offerings for good crops.
to di h'pa h'au, the long tabu.
to di h'ak, the tabu on traveling.
to di to h'la, the tabu connected with births.
to di to pu na to pu la, the tabu connected with eclipses.
to di to h'au to lau, the tabu connected with the rising and falling of a stream.
to di to h'la to p'pha, the tabu connected with death.
to ho to pu } witchcraft or bad magic.
to ho to lo }
to h'la h'la, the cool season.
to h'pa do, the great one, used of the elephant by men hunting but the spirits should hear its name mentioned.
to h'pa h'au a k'la, to recall a human spirit from under the water.
to h'ak hu na hu, a raid.
to h'hou, things that will win.
to ho h'la, the hot season.
to buah k'la h'pa do, the great ceremony of recalling the human spirit.
to lo m, fighting the dead on their way.
to lah h'au, a game at funerals. (Mt., stretching the neck).
to li, a sacrifice or offering.
to li h'pa do, a great sacrifice to the lords of the earth.
to li h'pa, the small sacrifice to the lords of the earth.
to li h'la h'la h'la, an offering to the water witches.
to li lau pa lau, offerings to the celestial spirits that preside over births.
To m-é na, the spirits of those who have been notoriously evil.
to na, malevolent supernatural beings.
to na na, the smell of burning fat.
to p'li aw hu, the fleeting existence of babies who die soon after birth.
to na h'la, the game of jumping bamboo poles.
to na h'la, the rainy season.
to f' p'ha to, Mt., it is not good (spoken of things tabued).
to f' hu, ghosts of persons left unburied.
to f'h'au h'au, a one-legged female demon.
to f' na, a canopy erected over a bier.
to lau lau ta, offerings to the demons.
to lau h'la h'ak, offerings for the spirits of notoriously evil persons.
to to h'la, pounding parties (a funeral game).

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Ap ui to ua, evil spirits.
to ua, a sickle.
to yau ha e k'ia, recalling human spirit from the clutches of a wizard.
to yau ha, the dry season.
tau, a paddy basket, (Burmese, tauag).
tau, a paddy basket, (Burmese, tauag)
tau hwe tau, } a ceremony performed at funerals of very old men.
tau hlaw tau, }
tau lau ha, to marry outside the tribe.
Tau Mah, the mythical ancestor of the Karen race.
Tau hweh, the rainbow.
ten, a bag.
Th' is, the first month.
th' ruh e' ha, spirits of those who have died violent deaths.
th' wau, a village.
tha, soul.
th' wa, a crocodile.
the wa, a monarch of hadan.
thak e' hui, to make offerings for the field.
to th' wa, to make offerings for the field.
Thi hko mi wa, the lord of the demons, of heaven and earth.
thi hui, a bamboo pole or standard used in the hga feast.
thit aq (Burmese), laquer.
Thi thwa, Thursday.
tha, a blood brother.
Thwa hwa, the third month.
To hwa, Wednesday.
to me to pi, paste made of glutinous rice.
To mi, Tuesday.
tu, traps in which weights fall on the victims.

U, to embroider.

ugh de de, to thrust the finger into one's nasal to prevent the rainbow demon from injuring one.

Wa, bamboo.

Wa Ahwa, a spring trap; a spear made of bamboo.

Wa Ahu, a kind of large buri.

wa, a basketwork paddy-bin; older brother or sister.

wa hpe Ahwa, older brother.

wa hpe mi, older sister.

wa, prophet; seer.

Xa, a sickle.

xa Ahu, a plant used for poisoning the water in fishing.

Y'wa, the Great Spirit of the Karen; God.

ya, wild plantain or banana.